

Message Text

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TO WHITE HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS AGENCY IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 080362

PLS PASS TO V-PRES ACFT NO 86970 FOR DEP ASST SECY MILLER

FOLLOWING REPEAT BANGKOK 8228 ACTION SECSTATE INFO DIA
COMUSMACTHAI, CINCPAC 02 APR

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 8228

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PGOV TH

SUBJECT: THAI ELECTION PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S.
POLICY

REF: BANGKOK 2289

SUMMARY: NEXT GOVERNMENT WILL BE HEADED BY A LEADER OF ONE
OF THE LARGER PARTIES. MOST LIKELY COALITION POSSIBILITIES
ARE DEMOCRAT/SOCIAL JUSTICE OR THAI NATION PARTY/SOCIAL
ACTION PARTY. THAI NATION MAY JOIN DEMOCRATS AND SOCIAL
JUSTICE COULD JOIN WITH SOCIAL ACTION. SMALL PARTY
PARTICIPATION IN A COALITION SEEMS LIKELY, WITH A RESULTANT
POTENTIAL FOR INSTABILITY. END SUMMARY

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1. FOLLOWING PRE-ELECTION SURVEY OF PRIME MINISTERIAL
POSSIBILITIES IS LIMITED TO THE LEADERS OF THE MORE IMPOR-
TANT POLITICAL PARTIES.THERE ARE OTHER POLITICIANS
WHO ARE ABLE MEN, BUT THEY ARE GENERALLY ALREADY EITHER

PARTY SUBORDINATES OF ONE OF THESE LEADERS, OR ARE LEADERS OF PARTIES WITH LITTLE POTENTIAL FOR A MAJOR SHARE OF THE VOTE. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT A LEADER OF A SMALL PARTY WILL FORM A GOVERNMENT THIS TIME, AS KHUKRIT PRAMOT WAS ABLE TO DO IN 1975.

2. ASSUMING THAT THEY ALL WIN SEATS IN PARLIAMENT (THE PRIME MINISTER, ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION, MUST BE A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT) THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER WILL PROBABLY BE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING: (1) CURRENT PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT, LEADER OF THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY (SAP); (2) FORMER PRIME MINISTER SENI PRAMOT, LEADER OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY (DP); (3) CURRENT DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE PRAMAN ADIREKSAN, LEADER OF THE THAI NATION PARTY (TNP); (4) RETIRED AIR CHIEF MARSHAL THAWI CHUNLASAP, LEADER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY (SJP); OR (5) DR. KRASAE CHANAWONG, LEADER OF THE NEW FORCE PARTY. LEADERS OF SOME OF THE SMALLER PARTIES, SUCH AS BUNCHANA ATTHAKON OF THE PEOPLES' FORCE PARTY, MIGHT CONTROL ENOUGH VOTES TO AFFECT THE CHOICE AMONG THE ABOVE POSSIBILITIES IN A DECISIVE WAY, BUT NONE SEEMS LIKELY TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER. WITHOUT ANALYZING THE PROSPECTS FOR PRAMAN, THAWI, OR KRASAE IN DETAIL, IT IS PROBABLY ENOUGH TO NOTE THAT THEY WOULD HAVE A CHANCE OF BECOMING PRIME MINISTER ONLY IN THE EVENT KHUKRIT OR SENI PRAMOT ARE UNABLE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT.

3. IF EMBASSY PROJECTIONS OF ELECTION RESULTS (SEE SEPTTEL) ARE FAIRLY ACCURATE, THE NEXT GOVERNMENT WILL BE FORMED AROUND A COALITION OF SOME COMBINATION OF FOUR PARTIES LIKELY TO EMERGE AS THE LARGEST IN THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. ALL OF THEM ARE BASICALLY EITHER CONSERVATIVE OR MODERATE IN OUTLOOK. SHOULD A COALITION OF SOME OF THESE LARGER PARTIES LACK A MAJORITY OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT, THEN PARTICIPATION OF SOME OF THE MINOR PARTIES WILL BE ESSENTIAL, AND INTENSIVE BARGAINING FOR THIS MARGINAL SUPPORT WILL

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OCCUR. TWO COMBINATIONS SEEM MOST LIKELY AT THIS TIME; (1) A DEMOCRAT/SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY ALLIANCE, WITH THE POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION OF THE THAI NATION PARTY; AND (2) A THAI NATION/SOCIAL ACTION PARTY COALITION WITH THE POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY.

4. THE DP AND SJP HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN CONSIDERING FORMATION OF A COALITION TOGETHER FOR SOME TIME NOW, AND THE COMBINATION SEEMS TO BE A LIKELY ONE. SENI OR HIS DESIGNEE WOULD BE PRIME MINISTER AND THAWI, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. IT IS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT SUCH A COALITION WOULD CONTROL A MAJORITY OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT, THUS MAKING PARTICIPATION BY AT LEAST ONE MORE PARTY ESSENTIAL.

AN ALLIANCE OF THESE TWO PARTIES WITH SAP IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH WOULD BE INVOLVED IN FINDING POSITIONS FOR THE TWO PRAMOT BROTHERS (AND DECIDING WHICH ONE WOULD BE PRIME MINISTER), BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE ADMISSION OF SOME UNSAVORY FIGURES INTO THE SAP OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, WHO WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE DP. THE TNP MIGHT JOIN A DEMOCRAT/ SOCIAL JUSTICE COALITION IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT THERE WOULD BE DIFFICULTIES WITH THIS AS WELL. TNP LEADER PRAMAN IS VERY ANXIOUS TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER, AND WOULD PROBABLY INSIST ON HOLDING THAT POSITION, AT LEAST IN INITIAL NEGOTIATIONS. THIS WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE DEMOCRATS. THE DP IS ALSO RUMORED TO BE INTERESTED IN HAVING RETIRED GEN. KRIT SIWARA AS ITS MINISTER OF DEFENSE (KRIT HAS CLOSE CONNECTIONS WITH THE SJP AND THAWI AS WELL).

5. A SAP/TNP COALITION WILL ALSO RUN INTO PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF PRAMAN'S AMBITIONS TO BE PRIME MINISTER. THIS COALITION DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE QUITE AS LIKELY A POSSIBILITY AS IT DID AFTER THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT IN JANUARY, WHEN THE TWO PARTIES DECLARED AN ALLIANCE IN THE ELECTION AND STATED PUBLICLY THEIR INTENTION OF SETTING UP A NEW COALITION TOGETHER IF THEY WON. IF KHUKRIT IS RE-ELECTED IN HIS OWN DISTRICT, SUCH A COALITION WOULD ONLY BE ACCEPTABLE TO SAP IF HE WERE PRIME MINISTER AGAIN, AND PRAMAN WOULD AGAIN BE RELEGATED TO SECOND PLACE. SHOULD KHUKRIT LOSE, HOWEVER, AND PRAMAN'S CHANCES IMPROVE, THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF

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GROWING TNP DISSATISFACTION WITH THE SAP, ESPECIALLY CONCERNING THE ADDITION OF CORRUPT ELEMENTS TO SAP MENTIONED ABOVE. IF SUCH A COALITION DOES TAKE SHAPE IN THIS SITUATION, IT WILL PROBABLY NOT CONTROL ENOUGH SEATS IN PARLIAMENT TO FORM A GOVERNMENT BY ITSELF.

6. THE KEY ELEMENT IN PREDICTING THE STABILITY OF THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, AND THE ONE MOST DIFFICULT TO JUDGE, IS THE VOTE ON APRIL 4. WHILE THE EMBASSY FEELS THAT ITS ESTIMATES OF POSSIBLE PARTY STRENGTHS ARE REASONABLY ACCURATE, ELECTIONS IN THAILAND ARE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO PREDICT, AS THERE HAVE ONLY BEEN TWO RELATIVELY FREE ELECTIONS SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II. WITH A COALITION OF SOME SORT VIRTUALLY CERTAIN, STABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT WILL DEPEND PRIMARILY ON THE RELATIVE SIZE OF THE VARIOUS PARTIES VYING FOR CONTROL OF THE COALITION. IT WOULD APPEAR FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LAST COALITION THAT A MINIMAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (PROBABLY FIVE OR SIX) IS ESSENTIAL TO STABILITY. SHOULD THE COALITION CONSIST OF TWO PARTIES WHICH CONTROL A MAJORITY OF VOTES (WHICH WE CONSIDER EXTREMELY UNLIKELY), A STABLE GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY RESULT. IF PARTICIPATION OF SMALLER PARTIES BECOMES

ESSENTIAL, AS WE SUSPECT WILL BE THE CASE, THE POSSIBILITY OF INSTABILITY WILL INCREASE. THE SMALLER PARTIES WOULD THEN BE IN A POSITION OF CONTROLLING THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF THE COALITION, AND WOULD WIELD POWER FAR BEYOND THEIR STRENGTH IN PARLIAMENT.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY - POSSIBLE COALITION GOVERNMENTS DISCUSSED ABOVE ARE BASICALLY PRO-WESTERN IN OUTLOOK AND VALUE CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND THE U.S.

8. THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME SEEM TO TURN AROUND COALITION GOVERNMENTS INVOLVING THE DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTIES (HEADED BY SENI PRAMOT) OR BY THE SOCIAL ACTION-THAI NATION-SMALLER PARTIES (HEADED BY KHUKRIT PRAMOT). A SIGNIFICANT MOVE TO THE LEFT SEEMS TO BE EXCLUDED AT THE PRESENT TIME. SO DOES THE EMERGENCE OF A CONSIDERABLY STRENGTHENED COALITION GOVERNMENT, ABLE TO MOVE DECISIVELY ON THE RANGE OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL ISSUES
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CONFRONTING THAILAND AT THIS TIME.

9. THERE IS LITTLE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THESE TWO COALITIONS IN TERMS OF POLICY. BOTH ARE ESSENTIALLY CONSERVATIVE IN OUTLOOK, ALTHOUGH A DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL JUSTICE COALITION WOULD BE UNDER CONTINUING PRESSURE FROM WITHIN THE RANKS TO PLACE ACHIEVEMENT OF A GREATER MEASURE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE FOREFRONT OF ITS POLICY CONSIDERATIONS.

10. AS NOTED ABOVE, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT A NEW COALITION LED BY KHUKRIT WILL BE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE CORRUPTION-PRONE THAN THE PREVIOUS KHUKRIT CABINET.

11. A MORE CORRUPT RTG COULD PRESENT THE U.S. WITH SOME ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS IN ARRANGING FOR VARIOUS FORMS OF ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND, GIVEN THE GROWING CONCERN IN CONGRESS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INSTANCES OF CORRUPTION IN FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS ABROAD.

12. THE MAJOR DANGER THAT THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF THESE ELECTIONS PRESENTS IS THAT THE RELATIVELY WEAK COALITION GOVERNMENT LIKELY TO BE FORMED MAY NOT REMAIN LONG IN OFFICE. PREDICTIONS ABOUND IN BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN CIRCLES THAT SUCH A WEAK COALITION WOULD NOT LAST MORE THAN A FEW MONTHS AND WOULD BE EFFECTIVELY OVERTURNED BY A MILITARY COUP OR ITS PERSONNEL AND POLICIES DRASTICALLY CHANGED BY A CIVIL-MILITARY TAKEOVER IN SOME FORM, PERHAPS PRESERVING A PORTION OF THE CONSTITUTION AS WINDOW-DRESSING. MILITARY OBJECTIONS TO THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION TEND TO TURN ON TWO ISSUES: THE LACK OF OBSTACLES TO THE FORMATION OF NUMEROUS, WEAK PARTIES; AND THE

REQUIREMENTS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER MUST BE A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THAT 50 PERCENT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CABINE MUST SIMILARLY BE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE REPRESENTATIVES.

13. A COUP OR A CIVIL-MILITARY TAKEOVER OF THE GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER SUBSTANTIAL RESISTANCE FROM THE STUDENTS AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES, THOUGH MUCH WOULD DEPEND ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES. NO ONE KNOWS HOW MANY CASUALTIES THE MILITARY WOULD BE REQUIRED TO INVICT TO RE-CONFIDENTIAL

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ESTABLISH ORDER UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES INVOLVING AN EXTRA-CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT, BUT THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IS THAT SIGNIFICANT BLOODSHED WOULD OCCUR. IN SUCH AN EVENT, THE WAY WOULD BE OPENED FOR A STEADY INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY, WITH NON-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS JOINING THE COMMUNIST IN RESISTENCE TO SUCH A MILITARY OR CIVIL-MILITARY GOVERNMENT. U.S. ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE RTG IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT ALSO BE DIFFICULT TO CONTINUE WITH.

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